

External Evaluator's Report
to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
(ARACIS)
about the Institution Organizing Doctoral Study Programmes
(IOSUD)
University of Bucharest 2021

INTRODUCTION

I was appointed as an International Expert for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was invited to join the evaluation team for the evaluation (IOSUD) of University of Bucharest (UB). The audit took place between 22-26 November. The evaluation process was conducted online. The evaluation team had a preliminary meeting (Zoom) Wednesday 17 November in the evening to discuss the main methodological aspects related to the institutional evaluation and establish the details of the visit.

A huge evaluation team (63 members) took part in the evaluation process as UB has 22 doctoral schools. UB organises doctoral studies in 19 scientific fields and it has 2014 PhD students. UB is a very important representative of the Romanian higher education, its tradition extending over 150 years.

The evaluation process began on Monday 5 June at 9 a.m. at Zoom platform with the meeting for the preparation and harmonization of the evaluation steps in the hybrid work mode both at institutional and doctoral study domains' level.

METHOD

In my role as an International Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of IOUSUD.

Therefore

- I previously studied the Self-evaluation Report of the IOSUD and its' Annexes;

- I also studied the websites of UCV, which were available in English;
- I attended most of the common sessions according to the timetable of the institutional evaluation visit (22-26 November) as an observer (simultaneous translation was available);
- I addressed written questions to the stakeholders, which I could not discover in the documents in advance or could not follow during the online meetings. (The questions I asked remained unanswered.)

My findings and comments are based on the studied documents, the information I have gained from the websites of UB and I have heard during the meetings. Some quality indicators are used according to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) to carry out the diagnosis.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources

UB is a public higher education institution and its Doctoral Schools seem to operate according to the legal provisions that govern the higher education system in Romania and in compliance with the university's own internal regulations. The internal regulations are revised regularly to be in line with the legal norms in force. The revision is also based on the previous years' experiences.

The methodology are dedicated to organising the admission to doctoral programmes are clear. The Council of Doctoral Studies of IOSUD - University of Bucharest (CUDS -UB) has 17 members (1 director, 1 supervisor, 2 students and 13 doctoral schools' directors). They are mostly appointed by the rector and only a few members are elected. The Directors and the Councils of the Doctoral Schools (3-10 members) coordinate the activity of each Doctoral School. Members from outside the doctoral school can be found among the members of CSD at the Doctoral Schools, mostly from other Romanian universities. Foreign professors can be found also among the members of CSD at a few Doctoral Schools (e.g. Doctoral School in Political

Sciences; Doctoral School in Literary and Cultural Studies). The participation of more foreign professors might be also recommended.

The Doctoral Schools are mainly organised disciplinary, but an Interdisciplinary School of Doctoral Studies was established in 2018, which welcomes doctoral dissertations written in international languages, specialized in any of the doctoral scientific fields approved for UB. There are also other doctoral schools (e.g. Doctoral School in Communication Sciences) where an interdisciplinary approach is recognizable.

UB have been using appropriate software application (UMS) for the record of doctoral students and their academic achievements since academic year 2018/2019. The software is intended both for admission into the doctoral schools and the management of doctoral studies from beginning to end. The information system that logs data on doctoral students and their academic path fully abides by the GDPR regulations on personal data protection.

University of Bucharest uses two dedicated software (<https://www.turnitin.com/> and <https://sistemantiplagiat.ro/>) to check the similarity index of all doctoral theses. They were certified by Education Minister's Order No. 3485/2016.

Research infrastructure

It is very difficult to gauge that the research infrastructure of Doctoral Schools fulfil all the requirements (research and development units, laboratories, libraries etc.) without being present myself on site.

Scientific research in the university is structured into research groups and centres, which are hosted either at departmental level or at the Research Institute of the University of Bucharest. There are 92 research groups and centres at UB. One of the vice-rectors is responsible for research activity within the university.

The scientific research at UB is also assured by „Carol I” Central University Library in Bucharest with its 16 branches. The library's collection amounts to a total of 2,401

147 volumes at the end of 2019 (of which 1,659,042 volumes are found in the branch libraries), serial publications: 25,725 titles, 424 771 volumes and 2,536,833 leaflets from different fields. Both in the central unit and in the branches of the library, the access is free to e-books, bibliographic references, bibliometric information and to more than 20 scientific databases which contain approximately 65 000 titles from periodical publications. The Central University Library and its branches offer a rich depository of books and access to databases. The modern research facilities supports the development of PhD students scientific activities.

According to the Self-evaluation Report and the information gained on ERRIS (Engage in the European Research Infrastructures System) platform, it seems that UB has well equid research infrastructure.

UB has cooperation with academic institutions, higher education institutions, research institutes from Romania and abroad, which are based on bilateral or multilateral collaboration agreements.

The Council for University Doctoral Studies has become a cost centre recently, which will allow investments in the renewal of the research infrastructure and the purchase of consumables for scientific research. The ambition of UB in research activity is quite clear: the continuous development of the performance of research in the university.

Quality of Human Resource

The quality of human resources and the scientific potential at UB is on very good level. The transparencies of the personal records are clear.

The doctoral supervisors' number is in proportion with the number of students. It seems that the share is consistently below 20% for each doctoral school. In my opinion the workload must be reduce of those supervisors who has too many doctoral students for the quality.

EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest

The admission requirements and procedures are mostly well documented in every doctoral school at UB. The admission criteria and selection procedures are in line with the European standards. Besides the recognition of prior studies results, other scholarly activity such as research and publication records are taken into consideration in the selection process. The admission contest consists a written test and an interview in front of a commission.

UB has special admission procedure and they are granting special scholarships. For example, UB has approved for the doctoral studies admission in the academic year 2021/2022 special seats for Roma candidates. Other kinds of support for the UB students are available, including study scholarships for students residing in rural areas.

Procedures on the monitoring of the academic path of the students and the prevention of drop-out can be found within IOSUD, containing proposal aimed at reducing drop-out among doctoral students (Programme preventing the drop-out by doctoral students).

The content of doctoral programmes

Three disciplines are offered within the doctoral schools' training programmes based on advanced academic studies tailored for the training in scientific research of the doctoral students. Also a general course offered to all doctoral students, entitled "Scientific research methodology and statistical data processing methods". The discipline Academic Ethics and Integrity is mandatory in all doctoral curricula.

Doctoral Programmes at UB try to respond to the needs of the labour market and expectations of the national economy. UB is engaged in scientific research also through doctoral programmes.

The level of the curriculum design, teaching and assessment and the academic and professional standards are, in general, in line with the standards expected of a qualification at EQF Level 8. I believe that, in general, the learning outcomes of the Doctoral Programmes are consistent.

The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation

Research is materialised in books, scientific articles published in specialized reviews, patents, research and development projects etc. The results of the scientific activities are presented at scientific conferences and also support is given for publishing original scientific papers in significant journals or proceedings volumes. The evaluation of PhD students in each study programme has clear criteria and mechanism, which are included and proved in the self-assessment report of the doctoral schools.

An extensive number of documents and guidelines offered about the research process, supervision and evaluation criteria of the doctoral studies. The evaluation processes of the students are clear.

Quality of doctoral theses

During the evaluated period 1100 dissertations were defended and submitted for validation by CNATDCU. The share of invalidated dissertations is below 0.6%. The PhD theses completed in the doctoral schools of UB meet high quality standards.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system

UB pays a special attention to quality assurance and it has a transparent quality assurance structure. UB concentrate on the different fields of the quality assurance:

quality assurance for management processes, quality assurance in teaching and scientific research.

At the central level, the responsibility for quality assurance belongs to the Quality Assessment and Assurance Board (QAAB), which designs and implements the quality management system at UB. (Each faculty has its own Quality Assessment and Assurance Board also.) The Rector has direct responsibility for the quality management at institutional level, but he delegates it to the vice-rector in charge of Quality management, Social responsibility and the Relation with social partners, who acts as president of QAAB. The operation of the QAAB is supported by an executive structure, namely the Quality Management Department (QMD), whose role is to provide support and consultancy both to the central board as well as to the similar boards existing in each faculty in order for them to implement and develop a comprehensive quality management system at the UB.

Specific to the doctoral studies is the involvement in the internal quality assurance processes of the Council for University Doctoral Studies (CUDS), as well as of the Doctoral Schools' Councils. CUDS coordinates the quality monitoring, assessment and assurance; it adopts the measures necessary to ensure the quality of the doctoral studies, the performance of the regular assessment of the doctoral school and doctoral supervisors, the compliance with the ethical and deontological rules of the doctoral supervisors and doctoral students.

The internal assessment of each doctoral school shall deal with several aspects and indicators (e.g. scientific performance of doctoral supervisors; infrastructure and facilities required for carrying out the research activity; regulations and procedures based on which doctoral programmes are organised etc.).

It is worth mentioning again that the dropout prevention procedure provides for counselling during the university doctoral studies.

Two doctoral students' representatives are elected through universal, direct, secret and equal vote in the Council for University Doctoral Studies. All the doctoral schools' councils include doctoral students elected through universal, direct and secret vote from among the doctoral students.

Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

The doctoral students have access to academic relevant databases and scientific publications are provided by the (e)libraries also. The doctoral students' free access to the scientific literature on ANELIS Plus.

Academic misconduct and plagiarism are serious breaches of academic standards. Two internet-based plagiarism detection software are available for doctoral students. Allegations or suspected cases of academic misconduct or plagiarism are investigated and managed by the Ethics Committee in accordance with the Code of University Ethics and Deontology.

A significant dimension in the quality assurance policies' implementation is information transparency. Therefore, all the decisions, documents, procedures and regulations adopted by UB are being debated, promoted and published with the aim to involve and empower the entire academic community. (Not all doctoral schools have available information in English on their websites.)

Internationalization

UB students have several opportunities to take part in Erasmus+ Programme at hundreds partner universities including also the doctoral level. The number of physical mobility were limited in the last years, because of the pandemic situation. Although efforts were made in the assessed period, there is still room for improvement.

It seems that attending international scientific conferences are the most popular mobility form at UB. The doctoral students of all doctoral schools of the IOSUD benefit from support, including financial aid, for research mobility and international conferences abroad.

UB is a member of the CIVIS network. Through this partnership the doctoral students have access to mobility programmes and can work under international co-supervision. UB has implemented the "European Doctorate" additional certification. It

can be awarded if four conditions established by the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences are completed. It is meant also to boost the participation of doctoral students in training mobility abroad. Both of them are great opportunity for the PhD students. Increasing co-supervisions with foreign professors is encouraged.

According to the self-evaluation report, those PhD theses that are written and/or defended in an international language or made in co-supervision, currently the percentage is above 10% at all doctoral schools, at some of them being above 25% and even greater than 40%.

The amount of information available in English has increased significantly at UB, especially if I compare with other Romanian universities, but still not complete. UB participates in several education fairs abroad.

System for assurance of ethical and academic integrity

UB has procedures for plagiarism and collusion. The supervisor has to do everything to prevent plagiarism, but the student should ensure that all copyright requirements avoiding plagiarism are met.

Allegations or suspected cases of academic misconduct or plagiarism are investigated and managed by the Ethics Board in accordance with the UB Charter, the UB Code of Ethics and the regulations for the functioning of UB Ethics Board. The competencies and the responsibilities of the Ethics Board are very clearly defined.

A Research Ethics Board is also operates at UB is an autonomous body dealing with the ethical assessment of research projects seeking financing or under implementation. Other two organizational unit at UB deal with ethical issues (Centre for Action, Resources, and Training for Academic Integrity; Centre of Applied Ethics Research).

All complaints of plagiarism suspicions about doctoral dissertations have been analysed and settled by the IOSUD within the time limit prescribed for issuing a written opinion about a received complaint.

UB permanently monitors and evaluates the practices and mechanisms implemented, any possible violations of the Academic Ethics and Integrity Code.

During the reporting period, CNATDCU issued five final decisions to revoke doctoral degrees due to suspected plagiarism in dissertations defended at the University of Bucharest. In all these cases, UB acted in accordance with the CNATDCU decisions and the relevant laws in force.

All the doctoral dissertations are being submitted, in physical and electronic format at the National Library, according to the legal requirements in force. The dissertations the authors of which have not opted for distinct publication are made public on REI (Integrated Education Register), the national electronic platform of the Education Ministry, after the issue of the doctoral degree.

Technical steps have been made in order to build a public database in which the doctoral dissertations defended publicly starting with 2016 will be transferred.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strenghts

- Appropriate coordination of doctoral programmes;
- Quality assurance approach;
- High quality human resources;
- Culture of innovation and self-reflection;
- Well equipped infrastructure for the doctoral students;
- Wide range of doctoral studies for ponetial candidates.

Weaknesses

- Integration of PhD students in international research networks;
- The number of courses taught in an international language;
- The availability of each doctoral school's website in foreign languages.

Opportunities

- Increasing the number of international students;
- Attracting new international PhD supervisors/experts who are recognised in their field of research and can be involved in co-tutelage and/or guidance committees or doctoral committees;
- Consortium network (CIVIS);
- Investing in human resource and physical infrastructure when funding allows;
- The organisation of PhD studies in fields that are not yet represented.

Threats

- Decreasing demographic figures/number of graduates in master programmes/potential candidates;
- Non-competitive wages (maintain the high quality of human resource);
- Lack of appropriate funding for scientific research;
- Prolonged pandemic situation by COVID-19.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGMENTS AWARDED AND OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
1.	PI	A.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
2.	PI	A.1.1.2.	fulfilled	
3.	PI *	A.1.1.3.	fulfilled	
4.	PI	A.1.2.1.	fulfilled	
5.	CPI	A.1.2.2.	fulfilled	
6.	PI	A.2.1.1.	fulfilled	
7.	PI	A.2.1.2.	fulfilled	
8.	PI	A.2.1.3.	fulfilled	
9.	PI *	A.3.1.1.	fulfilled	
10.	CPI	A.3.1.2.	fulfilled	

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
11.	PI *	B.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
12.	PI	B.1.1.2.	fulfilled	
13.	PI	B.2.1.1.	fulfilled	
14.	PI	B.2.1.2.	fulfilled	
15.	PI	B.2.1.3.	fulfilled	
16.	PI	B.3.1.1.	fulfilled	
17.	CPI	B.4.1.1.	fulfilled	
18.	PI	C.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
19.	PI	C.1.1.2.	fulfilled	
20.	PI	C.1.1.3.	fulfilled	
21.	PI *	C.1.1.4.	fulfilled	
22.	CPI	C.2.1.1.	partially fulfilled	Much more information in English or other foreign languages are need at the websites of UB for the international students.
23.	CPI	C.2.2.1.	fulfilled	
24.	PI	C.2.2.2.	fulfilled	
25.	PI	C.2.2.3.	fulfilled	
26.	PI *	C.3.1.1.	I do not have enough precise information	
27.	PI	C.3.1.2.	I do not have enough precise information	
28.	PI *	C.3.1.3.	fulfilled	
29.	PI	C.3.1.4.	partially fulfilled	Attracting new international PhD experts who are recognised in their field of research and can be involved in guidance committees or doctoral committees. (Lack of information about the involvement of international experts in

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
				guidance committees or doctoral committees.)
30.	PI	C.4.1.1.	fulfilled	
31.	PI	C.4.1.2.	fulfilled	
32.	PI	C.4.1.3.	fulfilled	
33.	CPI	C.4.1.4.	fulfilled	
34.	PI	C.4.1.5.	fulfilled	
35.	PI *	C.4.1.6.	fulfilled	
36.	PI	C.4.1.7.	fulfilled	

CONCLUSIONS

I would like to emphasize that UB represents a high quality in the Romanian higher education system and the activity reach the requirement of the European standards of education and scientific research. Although some room for improvement can be found, what I have mentioned in my report. The doctoral students' motivation, the staff (teachers, researches and administrators) commitments and professionalism are the basis of the success of UB.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to leadership of UB, all the university staff and each member of the evaluation team for the support during the evaluation mission. Also thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

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